Letter

Why assign the feminine gender to Europe?

From Adrienne Bernhard, New York, NY, US

MARCH 25, 2017

Sir, Timothy Garton Ash, in "There is still time to revive broken Europe" (March 18), cleverly outlines Europe's ailments with a medical metaphor: the continent is suffering from various illnesses that have weakened its political and financial immune systems — "eurozonitis, "egomania narcissistica trumpica", "gangraena brexitosa" — and it's now up to leaders to reform damaging policies before these diseases spread. But Professor Garton Ash's urge to assign Europe a gender — "Europa" — is anachronistic and tone deaf.

Why must the EU be an "old girl" on the eve of her 60th birthday, a "rather stately lady" whose "many distinct parts" signify a diverse population with complex (and sometimes competing) priorities, a convalescing woman in need of rehabilitation? Assigning a female pronoun to ships, nations and hurricanes might be historically acceptable, but the Financial Times should work to discourage this practice (as Chicago and AP style manuals have done), even if the intent is merely rhetorical or symbolic.

Prof Garton Ash rightly points out the need for politicians to "convey their solutions in direct, appealing language". That might mean swapping the timeworn trope of Motherland for a more gender-neutral analogy, especially since Father Time is at stake.

Adrienne Bernhard

New York, NY, US

Letter in response to this letter:

Communicating complex concepts in a few letters / From Christopher Ruane

Copyright The Financial Times Limited 2018. All rights reserved.